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Speaking the Truth in Love.

1838

Doane

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE;

THE SPIRIT OF THE CHURCH,

AND THE DUTY OF HER MINISTERS:

The Sermon

BEFORE THE CLERGY OF THE NORTHERN CONVOCATION

OF THE DIOCESE OF NEW JERSEY,

IN ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH, JERSEY CITY,

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1838,

BY

THE RT. REV. GEORGE WASHINGTON DOANE, D.D.,

BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE.

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Jersey City, Nov. 17, 1838.

Rt. Rev. and Dear Sir,

The undersigned, the Clergy attending the Convocation of the Northern Visitation of the diocese, anxious that the sound principles so clearly embodied in your highly instructive discourse of this morning, should be as widely circulated as possible, beg leave to request a copy for publication.

EDMUND D. BARRY,

J. M. WARD,

M. H. HENDERSON,

SMITH PYNE,

PETER L. JAQUES,

REUBEN J. GERMAIN,

RICHARD CHANNING MOORE,

JAMES A. WILLIAMS,

F. OGILBY,

WILLIAM STAUNTON,

HENRY BURROUGHS,

ROBT. DAVIES,

WILLIAM CROES CRANE.

S E R M O N .

EPHESIANS IV. 15.

S P E A K I N G T H E T R U T H I N L O V E .

Indifference to truth is the prevailing error of the age. To be zealous for it, is to incur the charge of narrow-mindedness, exclusiveness and bigotry. It is enough if men be sincere, even though it be in error. To be charitable is now the fashion. And so broadly and strongly has the distinction been drawn, that TRUTH and CHARITY are almost made to appear antagonist principles. But can it indeed be so? Is not the Lord “the God of truth?” Is it not the wise man’s precept, “buy the truth, and sell it not?” Was it not recorded to the disgrace of some of old time, that they were “not valiant for the truth upon the earth?” Was it not the Apostle Jude’s exhortation to them that are “sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called,” that they should “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints?” And would not the Apostle Peter have all believers “always ready to give to every man that asketh a reason of the hope”

that is in them?—And as for the opposition between truth and charity, does not St. Paul expressly say that “charity rejoiceth in the truth?” Yea, more, while it is written in one place that “the Lord is a God of truth,” is it not in another place recorded that “God is love?” And does not the Apostle, in the text, by a most beautiful and happy touch, dispel this cloud of error and delusion, by blending both in one, exhorting all Christians to be “no more children, carried about with every wind of doctrine, but **SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE**, to grow up into him in all things, who is the head, even Christ?”

This most expressive stroke of the Apostle’s graphic pencil, while it describes the conversation which, at all times, and in all places, is incumbent on the Christian,—*to speak the truth in love*,—most happily defines, as it appears to me, the course which it becomes the Church, in setting forth her principles and claims, whether by her proper authorities, or in the person of her ministers and individual members, steadily to pursue. It is the course, permit me to say, my reverend and beloved brethren, which thus far she *has* steadily pursued, and which has gained for her so extensively the praise of moderation, and true Christian charity. And if a motto were to be selected to express the tone and spirit of her offices, and articles, and all her public documents, “speaking the truth in love,” would be the fittest and most just.

It is the duty of Christians, and most especially of Christian Ministers, *to speak the truth always, and to speak the truth always in love.*

I. i. *To speak the truth, is, in the first place, to assert nothing which is not true.* The Bible is the standard of the truth. “Sanctify them,” says Jesus, “through the truth; thy word is truth.” Here is the rule, then, of doctrine and of duty. To this unerring test, all doubtful and disputed questions must be brought; and none may go beyond the word of the Lord his God, to say less or more. On this subject the Church is most explicit. “Holy Scripture,” she says, in her sixth Article, “containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.” And again, in the form of ordering of Priests, she asks, “are you persuaded that the holy Scriptures contain all doctrine required as necessary for eternal salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined, out of the said Scriptures, to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing as necessary to eternal salvation but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?” To which the candidate is expected to reply, “I am so persuaded, and have so determined by

God's grace." The question indeed may arise, as to what the Scripture saith. For satisfaction on that point, God has established no infallible authority. Even if he had, it would be of no avail, unless he had also enabled all men infallibly to understand its decisions. We are left therefore to the diligent comparison of Scripture, bringing in aid the best lights of philology and history, and regarding as always the safest interpretation that which had earliest and most general acceptance,—which has come down to us in the keeping of the Church from the earliest and purest days, and combined most fully the requisites of an ancient rule of interpretation, in being received "always, every where, and by all."* Not to be omitted in connection with all these, is the exercise of a humble, candid and obedient spirit, earnestly seeking the aid of God's grace in the interpretation of his word; and striving always to appropriate that blessed promise of the Saviour, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

ii. To speak the truth is, in the second place, *to proclaim all that is true.* This is as necessary as the former. The truth of God is perfect and entire, wanting nothing, and with nothing superfluous.

* The celebrated maxim of Vincentius Lirinensis—"Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditum est." Among the revived treasures of the olden time for which we are indebted to the learning and piety of Oxford, is a very recent edition of his valuable *Commonitory*.

“ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness.” The distinction which men presume to make between essentials and non-essentials is, as regards God’s word, a false and dangerous distinction. Who shall presume to pronounce what he has spoken non-essential? Is it not written, “ he that keepeth the whole law, and yet offendeth in one point, is guilty of all?” What to our feeble vision may seem unimportant, he beholds, with its vast train of consequences, reaching through eternity. That he hath written it, is for us sufficient argument of its importance. He hath spoken, as he hath done, nothing in vain. Though it were the tithing but of mint, and anise, and cumin, when contrasted with judgment, and mercy, and faith, the Saviour’s sentence was, “ these things ye ought to do, and not to leave the other undone.” “ For thus it becometh us,” in imitation of the same divine Pattern, “ to fulfil all righteousness.”

It is in her firm adherence to what some are pleased to call the non-essentials of religion, that a distinctive feature of the Church consists. In her noble testimony to the great doctrines of the Gospel —the lost and guilty state of man by nature; the intervention, for his deliverance from it, of the divine, eternal Son, for our sakes becoming man; the expiation of all sin by the offering of his precious

blood ; our interest in it, and consequent justification before God, the fruit, through grace, of faith in its atoning merit; the progressive sanctification of the sinner, thus justified by faith, through the power of the divine Spirit—in regard to all these, she is justly recognized by all who love the Lord Jesus as a most faithful “witness and keeper of Holy Writ.” In her tenacious maintenance of that three-fold ministry, which Christ as certainly established as he taught at all ; in her adherence in all things to the order of the Apostles ; in her stedfast preference, to any occasional effort of devotion, of that venerable form of words, to which primitive piety gave utterance, and which uninterrupted use has hallowed and endeared—she is regarded, by not a few who name the name of Christ, as superstitious, formal and exclusive. But the charge is wholly groundless. None of these things are contrary to God’s word. Most of them are of his express appointment. All of them are important, as parts of that system by which saving truth is to be preserved and extended in the earth. The system so constructed has, from the Apostles’ times, continued to accomplish, with less of variation than can be found in any other institution in which fallen man has part, the purposes for which it was established. The warning voice of history, the visible evidences that meet us on every side of strife, misrule, and gross perversion of the truth, admonish us that none have

departed from it but to their own sad hindrance. Uninfluenced then by opposition, and undismayed by censure, we cling to the truth and order of the Gospel, as things which God hath joined, and man must never separate. We maintain the Cross within the Church, because it was so that Christ ordained that it should stand ; because it was so that Apostles and old saints proclaimed it, and contended for it with their blood ; and because it is only so that it ever has been and, as we believe, can ever be maintained, in its integrity and divine simplicity.

iii. Upon all these subjects the Church, and all her ministers, and all her members, that they may speak the truth as it is in Jesus, must speak *with perfect plainness, and entire sincerity.* They are “set for the defence of the Gospel,” and they must defend it in the way which the Lord ordained for its defence. They have no right to keep back any thing. Like faithful stewards, they must rightly divide the word of truth. They must proclaim, as fervent Paul proclaimed, “the whole counsel of God.” They go to bear out before dark and erring men the light which is to cheer and save them. To what purpose, if they leave it unprotected, to be deadened by the damps of indifference, or extinguished by the blasts of error? They go to reveal to a misguided world the truth which can alone reclaim and save it. To what purpose if it be left to be thrown down and

trampled under foot! Let them place the light within the candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house. Let them set the truth up high, upon the ground and pillar which the Lord appointed, that it may be seen and known of men, and be preserved from every harm. Let them preach "Christ crucified," indeed, the sinner's only hope, the single rescue of a world that lies in wickedness, the blighted victim of God's righteous indignation against sin. But let them preach him in the Church, which he purchased with his own blood, in which he would have all men to be gathered together and fed, of which he is now the Prince and Saviour, and which in his own good time he will translate from earth to heaven, that there may be "one fold, under one Shepherd." Not to do so, is to mock with cruel disappointment the world's last hope. Not to do so, is to frustrate the purposes of God, and make the Cross of Jesus ineffectual in the salvation of sinners. Go, follow it through the world. Go to Germany, go to Switzerland, go to the Puritan pulpits of Great Britain, and come back with the pilgrim fathers to the shores of our own New England. Where was the Cross of Jesus ever planted with a purer purpose of devotion, or defended with a self-sacrifice more generous and unreserved? By whom, since the Apostles' times, has "Christ crucified" ever been proclaimed, as the sole hope of sinners, with a zeal

more fervent, or a sterner disregard of compromise? And in how many of those pulpits is that precious doctrine now even so much as named? And what, to the descendants of those unshrinking witnesses of Jesus, is his Cross now become, but, as “to the Greeks, foolishness,” and, as “to the Jews, a stumbling block?” Do you ask, why? I will not undertake to answer. But this I say—and I commend the subject to your most candid consideration—where the order of the Apostles has been preserved with the truth of the Apostles, there has been no such fearful exhibition; where the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ has been preserved in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, it has suffered no such degradation. Let the instructive lesson have its proper influence with your hearts. Let not the unmeaning charge of bigotry remove you from your steadfastness. From the good “old paths” in which our fathers walked, and found rest for their souls, let us be driven by no alarm, nor lured by any temptation. Thankful to Him who has so called us to the knowledge of the truth, and so kept us in its enjoyment, let us evince our gratitude by our firm adherence to its instructions, and by our endeavours to proclaim it to the world—by making our “light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven.”

II. To do this, it will not be sufficient that we

speak the whole truth, that we speak the whole truth plainly. We must speak the truth *in love*. Men are naturally suspicious of those who have, or claim to have, advantages superior to themselves. A zealous and firm attachment to distinctive principles is very apt to be denounced as bigotry: and he who, from whatever conviction of duty and of conscience, refuses compromise with error, must expect to be set down as arrogant and exclusive. And it should frankly be conceded, that the conscious possessor of superior advantages,—and it holds in no case more frequently than in the enjoyment of peculiar religious privileges,—does live continually in danger, if he keep not his heart humble before God, of becoming arrogant and exclusive. Now the suspicion of these things, and much more their reality, is a most effectual hindrance to the truth. To prevent men from entertaining them in any degree, is not within our power. Divest ourselves of them, and greatly diminish the suspicion of them in others, by the help of the heavenly grace, we may. The fact that the mistrust in us, as Churchmen, of an exclusive spirit in the profession of our distinctive principles, and of an uncharitable consideration of those who differ from us, hinders very many from their fair consideration, should make us doubly anxious,—first, to dispossess ourselves of the evil, and then, to avoid even the appearance of it. The specific in both cases

is LOVE. To speak the truth acceptably and effectually, it must be spoken *in love*.

i. For, in the first place, this should be with Churchmen the only and sufficient *motive* to undertake the office, and discharge the duties of champions of the truth. It is not, and it cannot be, with sinful men a grateful office, nor are its duties light or easy. The truth, from the corruption of our nature, will seldom be acceptable. Did we not love mens' souls, then, and know that the truth is necessary to their salvation, why should we incur their displeasure, and become their enemies by proclaiming it to them? Let us look well, my Christian brethren, that this be indeed our motive. Though we give all our goods to feed the poor, and yield up our bodies to be burned as martyrs for the truth, without charity, it can neither honour God, nor be profitable to ourselves. But if love be indeed the principle that rules our hearts, if whatever we do in the defence or the dissemination of the truth be done as disciples of the Saviour, in his name and for his glory, then let us count no effort great, no sufferings hard, no loss severe, so that we may approve ourselves his followers, faithful unto death. Then, like the illustrious harbinger, who heralded the coming of the Lord, let us, in God's name, "constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice and patiently suffer for the truth's sake;”* and,

* Collect for St. John Baptist's Day.

like that holy martyr Stephen, who was the first to shed his blood in honour of the glorified Redeemer, let us “in all our sufferings here on earth for the testimony of the truth, look steadfastly up to heaven, by faith beholding the glory that shall be revealed, and learn like him to love and bless our persecutors.”*

ii. But, secondly, as love must be the motive, so must love direct the *manner* in which we speak the truth—“speaking the truth in love.” This is our bounden duty. We are not the judges of our brethren, whom we deem in error, but fellow-servants with them of a common Lord. What have we to do then with condemnation, or with denunciation? How dare we indulge in censure or reproach? To proclaim steadily and constantly, having always due regard to all the several proprieties of time and place and person, what we believe the truth; to be ready always to give the reason of our hope with meekness and in fear; to supply whatever means we have for the instruction and conviction of others; to add to all our arguments the powerful confirmation of a pure, benevolent and holy life; and, by continual prayer, to ask God’s blessing, “without which nothing is strong, nothing is holy,” upon our “work and labour that proceedeth of love”—this is the conduct which, as Christian champions, valiant for the truth upon the earth, it becomes us to adopt and to pursue.

* Collect for St. Stephen’s Day.

And, as this is the only right, so it is the safest and the most effectual way. Of doubts, of difficulties, of prejudices, of enmities, true Christian love is the great universal solvent. Many there are who would not brook a word's reproof, who, at the slightest semblance of compulsion or constraint, are ready to resist even unto blood, who yet, on the conviction fixed upon the heart that you love their souls, may be led by you through fire and water, and even to the gates of death. When the Almighty and All-wise would win an entrance into the world for the mysterious scheme of human redemption, the inscription which was graven on its front was in these touching words, "for God so loved the world." The blessed Jesus, that he might reclaim, instruct and save them, approved himself by gentle words and condescending manners, even among Pharisees and publicans, who hated and reviled him, "the friend of sinners." And the Supreme Disposer of all things on earth and in heaven, though the hearts of men are in his hand, as the rivers of water, to turn them as he will, does not control them, as he might, by his great power, but draws them to himself with "the cords of a man," and moulds them to his will by the persuasive gentleness of love.

My reverend brethren, in our intercourse with men whom we would gain to know and do the truth, let us be guided by these great and beautiful exam-

ple. Speak the truth always in love. In kindness and condescension, esteem others better than yourselves. While you deal plainly with their errors, deal gently with their souls. Remember Him who would not break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Make them in love, by your own meek and gentle exhibition of them, with the truths which you possess. Forgiving when there is need of forgiveness, and forbearing when there is need of forbearance, you will but follow his example who bears with you yet daily. You will soften the hard heart. You will overcome evil with good. You will gain your erring brother. Should you fail there, there is at leart one conquest that you will not lose. You will have ruled your own spirit, and gained the victory over yourselves.

My reverend brother,* whom we purpose now, God willing, to elevate unto that "good degree," which Paul holds out, for the encouragement of them who use the office of a Deacon well, you have not failed to lay to your own heart the solemn exhortation now delivered to the ministers of Jesus Christ, to speak the truth in love. You will not, I am well

* The Rev. William Croes Crane, deacon, Missionary, Minister of St. Paul's Church, Clinton; Calvary Church, Flemington; and St. Thomas' Church, Alexandria, was admitted to the order of the Priesthood, in presence of the Convocation.

persuaded, cease your care and diligence, by constant study and by faithful prayer, to approve yourself an “able minister of the New Testament,” “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.” You never will forget, I fondly trust, the awful weight of that responsibility which is now to rest upon you in full measure—the care of souls. The care of never dying souls, for which the Lord Jesus shed his precious blood! Dear brother, who is sufficient for these things? Who is sufficient for the salvation of his own soul? Who would not faint and fall, appalled and prostrate, even at the thought of such a charge, if upon his wisdom only, or on his sole strength, the care of souls relied? But, blessed be God, our sufficiency is not our own, but God’s who seeth the heart! Blessed be God, not on our righteousness, but on the forgiveness of our unrighteousness, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, do we presume to hope for pardon and acceptance and salvation! Blessed be God, the Saviour who died that he might ransom all the souls that were, and make them doubly his, has promised ever to be present with those to whom he left their sacred charge: and, by the mighty power of that divine and Holy Spirit which he purchased for us with his blood, sustain them in their humble efforts to make manifest the knowledge of his Cross, prepare the heart to feel and own its gracious, sanctifying savour, diffuse through all the life the preci-

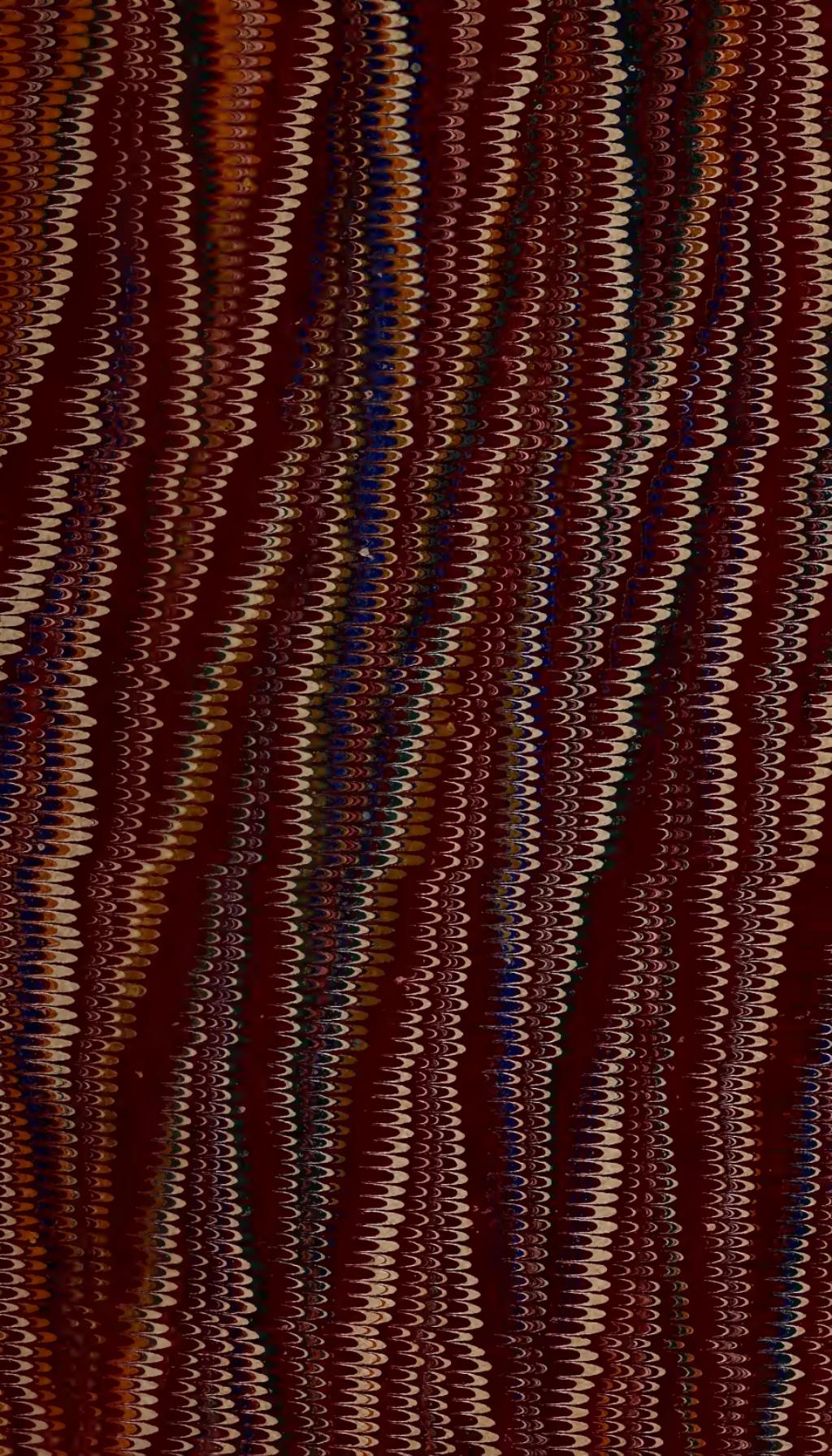
ous fragrance of humility and holiness and charity, and, working in and with all those who will receive him, both to will and to do the things which are acceptable to him, enable them by grace through faith to make their calling and election sure. Be of good cheer, then, brother. In the great and arduous work which you here undertake this day, the Lord himself is with you. The souls for which you are to watch are his. The reconciling word by which you are to win them back from sin and death to holiness and heaven are his. The grace from heaven which is to lend its unction to your teaching, and imbue your prayers with fervour, and shed the beauty and the power of holiness on all your life, is his. Nay, you yourself are his. He will not fail his own. He will not cast away his people that come bending to him, in penitence and tears. He will not leave his ministering servants, who are faithful unto him in all his house, without full proof of their acceptance, in souls renewed to holiness, and turned from sin to God. Be strong in the Lord, then, and in the power of his might. Look unto Jesus, as the Author and Finisher of the work which he has given you to do. Pour out your heart before him in daily and continual supplication, that he deal not with his people after their sins, nor reward them according to their iniquities. He will hear your prayer, and your cry shall come acceptably before him. He bore on

earth the contradiction of sinners, that he might be touched with the feeling of our trials, and be moved with compassion for our infirmities. Melted and moved yourself with the remembrance of his humiliation and agony and death, present him ever to the people of your care, as crucified for their transgressions. Refer them always to his precious blood, poured out upon the Cross, as the sole source to them of pardon and of peace, of pureness and salvation. The bleeding Lamb, whose sorrows melt and move your heart, will be effectual with them. They will look unto him whom they have pierced. The blessed Jesus, lifted up from the earth, will draw them, willing captives, to the power of his constraining love. The savour of his knowledge, made manifest by you in every place, will imbue their souls with its celestial fragrance, renew their hearts, and sanctify their lives. God will cause you to triumph in Christ. And the sweet savour of the Gospel which you preach—God forbid that through impenitence and unbelief it should approve itself to any the savour of death unto death!—will be, in all those who believe, the savour of life unto eternal life. May God mercifully grant it, for the sake of Jesus Christ his Son !

THERE WILL COME A TIME
WHEN THREE WORDS UT-
TERED WITH CHARITY AND
MEEKNESS, SHALL RECEIVE
A FAR MORE BLESSED RE-
WARD THAN THREE THOU-
SAND VOLUMES, WRITTEN
WITH DISDAINFUL SHARP-
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